

"THE DEVIL FIGHTER"

ACT I

ACT I

PLACE: Living room off dining-room in the Howards' apartment, New York.

TIME: Evening of an early Spring day - four years after Prologue.

(After curtain rises Elizabeth and Doris come in arm in arm, from dining-room R.)

Doris

(Enthusiastically)

What a feast you have given me! How do you get that way, anyhow, Beth - being such a good home-keeper?

Elizabeth

(Laughing)

They were all Tommy's favorite dishes! Isn't that stupid of him not to be home for them!

Doris

I'll say it was! - Do they keep him working overtime like this often?

Elizabeth

Oh no! - And he always phones! But --

(Poking pillows as she sits on sofa)

Well - I'm just not going to worry, that's all there is about it!

Doris

(Has strolled over to table, looking at photographs)

Who's this stunner?-

Elizabeth

(Turning to see)

Di. Lawton.

Doris

To be sure - Mrs. Jimmy! I might have known!

Elizabeth

I hope Tommy gets here before Greg arrives - he'll think it's queer.

Doris

(Coming to her impatiently)

Greg really is coming after all then?

Elizabeth

Yes - of course - didn't I tell you he phoned he was detained at the hospital but would surely get here soon after dinner -

Doris

(Relieved and pleased)

Oh! What a load off my mind! I didn't dare ask for fear of hearing the worst! - How I exist out of the sight of that man I scarcely can tell!

Elizabeth

Silly! - If Greg could hear you he'd turn you over his knee and spank you! -

Doris

(Blissfully)

I wouldn't care! It would be his knee!

Elizabeth

Idiot! And you know it's hopeless--!

Doris

Still I don't care! He's too blissfully wonderful! -

Elizabeth

Ass! - He's just an ordinary brother!

Doris

You know you don't mean that.

Elizabeth

Well - I suppose I do think he's pretty wonderful too. But - Oh - I don't know - lately he's gotten so much sterner and even more serious than ever! - It may be the result of his experiences abroad - but as a matter of fact, Greg has never been quite the same since the Lawton affair -

Doris

How's that? -

Elizabeth

He was her Doctor, you see -

Doris

Yes - but -

Elizabeth

Diantha, being sort of a sister to us - and - Oh - well -
It was all so involved - and he felt responsible.

Doris

But I can't for the life of me see how he should feel
responsible. Great night - he was overseas when she
drowned herself.

Elizabeth

Doris! I still can't bear to think about it! -

Doris

What was the matter with her anyhow -- just plain nuts?! -

Elizabeth

I don't know - somebody would have to tell you what it
meant anyhow, if I could remember it.

Doris

Well - she's gone - and now he's gone -! Suppose being
a widow just suits Diantha?

Elizabeth

I can't say she's grieved much.

Doris

About as much chance of her grieving as there is of a
cat over a dead mouse!

(The bell rings)

Elizabeth

(Jumping up)

There! Tommy's forgotten his key.

Doris

Oh, but maybe it's Greg!-

(Maid goes to the door)

(Over to her)

If it is - do I get him alone for five minutes?!-

(Elizabeth nods)

I'd do pink-hipgriffins all over the place if I could
make him pay some attention to me.

Elizabeth

I grant you a lot, Doris, but Greg's an unknown quantity.

(Greg enters in a quick businesslike way, though he is dressed in dinner jacket and looks very handsome.)

Greg

Howdado Doris! Beth dear -

(Kisses her)

Sorry to be late. Tom away?!

Elizabeth

No. He's late too - so Doris and I pined away over our solitary dinner.

Greg

Can I believe that? You had a regular school-girl reunion probably!

(Doris and Greg are seated.)

Elizabeth

We'll have to wait till Tom comes for some bridge, but -

(With a look at Doris)

I'll get the table ready -

Greg

Can I help?

Elizabeth

No indeed! Teresa is right here -

(Goes into dining-room)

Doris

(Naive tone)

Gre-eg - come on over and sit by me - I'm lonely.

Greg

(Getting up)

Certainly!

Doris

(Looking at him admiringly)

You are so big and strong! - You look like a great Greek something or other in that Tuxedo -

(As he sits)

I'm just crazy about the way it fits!

Greg

(Slightly Amused)

Fits well, does it?!

Doris

It's too doggie for words - you must go to the swankiest tailors.

Greg

I don't go to any tailor very often. I just sent my old suit along and had them copy it!

Doris

(Gushing)

Dear me, how clever! - But you are so clever anyhow Greg?!

(She looks up at him, very obviously vamping)

Greg

(Looks at her with an amused smile)

Doris - are you trying to vamp me?!

Doris

Why no - of course not?! How could you think of such a thing! I was just telling you the truth -

Greg

(Still smiling mildly)

Truth eh? - May you be pardoned in Heaven! -

Doris

(Up closer - even more coyly)

Oh Greg - I wouldn't care the slightest if I went straight to hell - if you would go with me!-

Greg

(Laughing uproariously)

Oh - ho - ho! - Now I know you're vamping me - Great stuff, Doris! -

Doris

(Getting up quickly)

Don't be mean!

Greg

(Still laughing)

Beth, did you know you were subjecting me to the wiles of an incorrigible siren?!

(Beth has been fixing bridge table, etc., back of them.)

Elizabeth

Discovered already! Eh, Doris?

Doris
(Pathetically) (Her back is turned)
Don't!

Greg
(Jumping up - going to her)
My word! The child meant it!!-
(Takes her hand and pulls her back to sofa)
(Still laughing)

Why, I thought you were just practising on me, a new method for laying low one of your young suitors! But look here, little one - no use wasting your time on me. I'm an old man compared to you.

Doris
(Pouting)
He thinks I'm still in the cradle, Beth.

Greg
And anyhow - I'm no fun - I don't even know how to play any more - Beth can tell you - it's just a waste of time to bother with me.
(Takes Beth's hand affectionately and sits her down on the other side of him.
Eh Sister? - Tom late often? -

Doris
But Greg - what is it that makes you so serious and far away nowadays? Is it the war - or the Lawton affair - or --

Greg
(His face clouds)
Partly! Partly!

Doris
Greg - how did they know Mrs. Lawton drowned herself?

Greg
She disappeared and then they found some of her clothes by the water's edge, I believe.

Doris
But what was the matter with her anyway?

Greg
(Almost fiercely)
Too much Diantha - You needn't repeat me! - The form it took was "mania depressive," - but -

Doris

I suppose she was dangerous if she really did try to stab Diantha --

Greg

A woman's quite liable to become crazed under such circumstance, especially when she's about to become a mother.

Doris

The baby didn't live did it?

Greg

(Shaking his head)
Fortunately.

Elizabeth

I wish you wouldn't talk about it, Greg!

Greg

Doris asked me.

Doris

They say now, Diantha will be out after you, Greg - that she's always wanted you - and that you're the one person she has never yet been able to vamp.

Greg

(Jumps up)
Great Scott! I haven't seen Diantha for months, and don't intend to! What stories people can tell! Besides, doesn't everybody know I've scarcely spoken to her since she married Jim Lawton! Can't we have some bridge without Tom?

Elizabeth

There! There's his key now! - I'm so relieved! --
(To door quickly)
(Tom whistles from hall. Beth answers. Starts to him.)

Tom

(Calling from outside)
Beth - I've brought Diantha along with me! -
(DIANTHA appears in doorway from hall.)

(Beth recoils a step or two, returns, starts and turns quickly facing her.)

Diantha

(Perfectly poised, though taking in the whole situation.)

Hello Beth, old girl! Haven't seen you in a dog's age!

(Kisses her in an off-hand manner)

Ah - and here's the cute little Doris! -

(Shakes hand.)

Doris

Howdedo, Mrs. Jimmie!

(Diantha goes right on)

Diantha

Well - Greg - how's the old-timer?!

Greg

(Formally)

How-de-do - Diantha -

Diantha

(Strolling over to sofa - slipping cloak off)

Oh, come off, Greg! We've got to make up sometime - it might just as well be now! - I'm going more than half way by offering you peace - after all the things you've said about -

Greg

About?!-

Diantha

Well - to me! - Oh - Tommy, boy! Do give me a cigarette! I've only had one since dinner.

(He has brought her one. As she taps him under the chin.)

He's such a good child, Beth - I asked him and he took me out to dinner.

Tommy

(Quickly)

You see - as I was coming from the office I met Di - and she thought it would make too many, Beth, if she came to dinner here - and as she was so hungry -

Diantha

We just stopped off at Sherry's!

Elizabeth

I see.

Diantha

And then - we came straight home like good little children -
eh Greg?! -

Greg

Tom's and Beth's home! -

Diantha

(Has stretched herself out on the couch.)
Dear me - do go on with your bridge game. Don't let me
disarrange any plans - I'm quite content here among the
cushions. And I promised Tommy I wouldn't be in the way.
(They move over towards bridge table.)

Tommy

But how about taking my place - I'd be glad -

Diantha

(Shakes her head)
I couldn't possibly get my mind on cards! After what
I've been through lately. Just let me lie and think.
After a sudden shock that's all one has strength for -
eh, Greg?!

Greg

Don't understand you, Diantha?!

Diantha

Is it possible that I'm a case that the great psychiatrist,
Dr. Gregory Blair, does not understand?

Greg

I understand you only too well, Diantha.

Doris

Shall we cut for partners.

Elizabeth

No need. I'll take Tom. I'd rather have him ball me out
than you, Doris.

Tom

(Huffily)
Humph! You give me a fine sort of a reputation, Beth.
(They have cut for deal. Beth is dealing.
Beth sits back of table. Doris on her right.
Greg left. Tom opposite, with back to stage.)

Diantha

It's a wise wife that doesn't know her husband too well! -

Elizabeth
Two hearts!

Greg
Two spades!

Tom
Three hearts!

Doris
By -!

Greg
Yours, Beth.
(Tommy lays down his cards and gets up.)

Elizabeth
Well - I can't say that that's much help. Tom, whatever did you go up for?!

Tom
There you go!
(Strolling over to Di.)
That's a peach of a hand if you play it right.
(Beth gives a look at Tom. They go on playing in silence for a few moments)
(Tom gets a light from Di's cigarette.)

Diantha
Well was it a shame! Beth abusing you again? She can scold - I know well. But no doubt you deserved it, as I generally did. Anyhow, you're a nice old dear to come over and cheer the poor old widow lady!

(Moves over for him to sit on sofa by her.)
You know, they say widows are dangerous, but I can't for the life of me see why. Black and white doesn't intrigue me in the least!

Tom
It's most becoming to you, I'll say! -

Diantha
Well, if the Tommy boy likes it I shall wear it another month or two. Was thinking of going out of mourning. It really isn't the thing to do, you know, since the war.

Elizabeth
There - I knew it. We're down one!

Doris
You couldn't have helped it, Beth. You played it like
a whiz!

Greg
(Sternly)
Come Tom!--

Diantha
(Squeezing his hand as he gets up to go back to
others.)
Go along - be a good boy! Do just as Beth says next time!
(Tommy goes back.)

Doris
Partner, if you please, I'd rather not have all the deuces
in the pack this time.

Diantha
(Still smoking languidly on the sofa.)
Greg, I wouldn't be at all surprised if this is the first
time you've crawled out of your shell in a year?!

Greg
(Who has been dealing)
By-! Depends upon what you call my shell!

Diantha
It's taken the fair Doris to work this miracle, I'll wager!

Doris
(Blushing)
Three no trumps! Great night! - I didn't mean that! There,
see, Mrs. Jimmy, what you've made me do! It's all right,
though!

Elizabeth
By! -

Greg
Go ahead, partner - you can do it.
(He lays down his hand but doesn't leave the table.)

Doris
I can if you'll give me some heavy advice!

Diantha
Since you're dummy, Greg, come on over. I'd like to have
a chat with you.

Gregory

(Getting up)
Can it, Diantha! Doris needs help.
(Goes around to Dori's side, stands by, helps her play the hand)

(Diantha shows plainly her anger, but nobody sees it. She smokes hard in silence for a few seconds, then jumps up, goes to victrola, starting it with a loud jazzy tune)

(First Beth, then Doris, then Greg stop and look over at her much annoyed by the noise.)

Gregory

Diantha, that noise is disconcerting to say the least.
(She pretends not to hear)

Diantha

Tom, this is even a better foxtrot than that one we heard tonight.

(Tom doesn't answer, but in a second after he has played on the luck he dashes over to her and starts to dance.)

Beth

Why, Tom! We haven't even finished the hand.
(Doris and Greg are talking about the cards. They go right on dancing.)

Beth

Tom -- it's very rude to Doris -- and --

Tom

(Still dancing)
Well, Di is our guest too and she ought to be entertained. Doris, you take a spin with Greg. The girls used to say he was quite a whiz!

Beth

(Throwing down cards -- angrily hysterical)
Of course it doesn't matter in the least to you that your wife has no partner.
(She turns away over R. trying to control her sobs)
(Greg goes to her. Doris discreetly starts looking at a magazine.)

Diantha
 (Laughingly to Tom, referring to Elizabeth)
 Temper, eh?
 (They go on dancing.)

Greg
 (Quietly to Beth)
 Hold on, Beth. Can't have this. Only make matters worse. Buck up!
 (Takes her arm)

Beth
 (Getting hold of herself)
 All right, Greg, but --

Diantha
 (Suddenly stops short in her dancing)
 There, Tommy, go dance with your wife now, like a good boy. Beth, you always were a jealous little fool.
 (Beth bridles)

Greg
 Diantha!
 (Bell rings loudly)
 (Pause)

Beth
 (Gets hold of herself)
 Tom, you had better see who that is. Teresa has gone to bed.
 (Tom goes)

Diantha
 (Perfectly self-possessed)
 Dear me -- callers at this time of night.
 (Voices are heard outside)
 (Beth goes to doorway, back left)

Tom
 Well, well! This is great. Fine stuff! So glad you came.

Amy
 (Appearing in doorway, excitedly)
 Oh -- it's a party! Oh dear, we're intruding terribly, but --

Beth
 (Kissing her)
 No, of course you aren't. So glad to see you. You know everyone -- except perhaps my brother, Gregory Blair.

(Greg bows)

Amy

How da --you do.

(She rushes at Doris. They embrace and kiss)

Oh Doris, I'm so glad you're here too.

Doris

Wherever did you get that very doggie wrap?

Amy

(Bubbling)

It's a secret, but I'll tell you sometime.

(Runs over to Diantha)

Oh, Mrs. Jimmy -- this is such a delightful surprise. I haven't seen you in such a long time. We've missed you so at the club lately.

Diantha

Thanks! My mother-in-law's six months of enforced retirement is about up. I'll be allowed out again soon.

Amy

Oh, aren't you clever.

Diantha

Fact of the matter is, I needed to take a rest cure. Had lost all my complexion since I went into mourning.

Amy

Heavens! No matter how one feels, one can't afford to weep too much, can they? It really does make lines,

Diantha

Fact!

Amy

But I can't see one -- not one in your face. And you look so stunning in black. Really!

(SPENCER ALDRICH who has followed Amy in with Tommy has made the rounds of how-de-do. He is a very young, awkward, shy boy. His eyes always glued on the twittery, bubbly Amy.)

Amy

Spencer, you know Mrs. Jimmie Lawton, don't you?

Spencer

(Coming over to greet Di awkwardly)
Yes. How de do, Mrs. Jimmie -- how is -- how's Mr. Lawton?

Diantha

Well, Spencer, you were at his funeral so you know as much about that as I do.

(All embarrassed. Doris giggles)

Spencer

(Ready to fall through the floor, clutches Amy)
Oh Gosh, Amy! I'm an awful dumb bell -- I forgot.

Amy

Please forgive him, Mrs. Jimmy. He is -- that is, we are both kind of excited tonight. We --

(Pokes Spencer)

Shall we tell them now?

Spencer

No -- yes -- anything you say.

Amy

(Poking him some more)

Well, go on -- you must do it.

Spencer

Gosh, gee, no! You do it. I've done the hardest part already.

Amy

(Running to Beth, taking her arm)

Oh Beth -- I -- we just had to tell somebody -- and as you and Tom are so happy, we came right away to you to tell you of our happiness.

(She flings her arms around the aghast Beth and whispers in her ear.)

Diantha

What's this, Spencer -- you and Amy aren't engaged, are you?

Spencer

(Scared)

Yes, Mrs. -- Jim -- Mrs. Lawton.

Diantha

Well, I'll be damned! Both just out of the cradle.

(Tom and Greg crowd around him saying the usual thing.)

(Doris rushes to Amy and Beth.)

(Diantha sits smoking, Left.)

Greg
(Pounding Spencer on the back)
Well, well, young man, you're starting at it pretty early, but I congratulate you.

Tom
So you're going to take the fatal step, eh?

Spencer
I suppose we are a couple of nit-wits, but you all didn't wait till you were a hundred to get engaged.

Tom
Come on, Di, it's your turn to congratulate the happy couple.

Diantha
(In a bored tone, shaking Spencer by the hand)
But engagements are such bores. You know sooner get the happy couple all congratulated up, than they go and get engaged to somebody else and you have to do it all over again.

Amy
(Clinging to Spencer)
Oh, Mrs. Jimmy, don't say that!

Diantha
(Kissing Amy in an offhand manner)
Well, Amy, you have him roped and thrown now. You can probably keep him that way if you don't wait too long.
(all laugh)

Amy
But I think long engagements are terribly agonizing, anyhow.

Diantha
Yes, it's such an uncertain state, there's always still time to change one's mind.

Amy

What I meant, was it's so hard waiting once one has made up one's mind.

Spencer

Well, it isn't likely I'll change my mind when I had such a hard time making it up.

Amy

Oh, Spencie!

Doris

Sweet Daddy -- it's all so exciting! I can hardly wait for the wedding now.

(Tommy comes in wheeling booze wagon)

Tommy

Here we are -- we're going to make it an A 1 celebration -- come on, boys, help me mix a knock-out.

Beth

(In a half-hearted way)

Yes, we must celebrate.

Amy

Oh what fun ! I never dreamt it would be as exciting as this, did you, Spencie?

Spencer

Gosh, it's been exciting enough for me ever since I got up the nerve to do the awful asking.

Amy

(Giggling some more)

Oh, but, Spencer! You looked so handsome -- and so stern and powerful -- I didn't think you could be so wonderful.

Spencer

Wonderful ! I felt like a fish!

Diantha

Fish, ha! And you're caught too, believe me!

Spencer

(Gruffly)

I'm glad to be, Mrs. Lawton.

Amy

Oh - how perfectly splendid of you to say that, Spencer. I'll never forget this night as long as I live.

Beth

(Softly to Tommy, while he is mixing drinks)
Remember the night we got engaged, Tommy?
(Before he has time to answer)

Diantha

Give me a long one, Tommy. I need courage to face all this bliss that's oozing out about us.
(All have drinks now)

Beth

Go on, Tommy, you give the toast.

Tom

Not I -- never made a speech in my life. Let old man Greg do it -- he's the oldest and wisest of us all. Yes, yes.
(From all)

Greg

(Confused a bit -- after a pause)
Why choose the only bachelor present to hold forth on matrimony?
(Others urge "Go ahead!" "It's up to you" etc.)

Greg

(After a pause)
Here's to matrimony! It's like a baseball game -- Team play -- the essential element. Plenty of sacrifice-hits to be made by both parties. Here's to the new battery -- may the hitting be light - the fouls few and fair play on all sides! May all troubles be put out at first. And may they, as the fans put it, win their own game. To Miss Van Cortland - Spencer!

(Others all say "Here" "Here" etc. Clinking of glasses and drinking.)

Tom

Come on, Spencer - now it's your turn.

Spencer

Me? Quit your fooling!
(Others all say "No, no" "Go on", etc.)

Amy

(Poking him)
Go on, Spencer.

Spencer

(Quickly to her in hushed voice while others are goading him on.)
Look here, I've been through an awful strain. Proposing ought to be enough for one night without having to make speeches and --

Tommy

(Pulling him away from Amy, and into the center of the group)
Come on now, we must have a speech from the prospective groom!
(Others are laughing, calling for "Speech! Speech!" etc.)

Spencer

(In misery)
Gee, if I'd known this was part of getting engaged, I surely would have hesitated some more.
Ahem! Ladies and gentlemen -- this is my first speech - may it be my last!
(Others applaud "Fine! Fine!" etc.)
I and -- Amy and I want to thank you. We want to thank you -- and -- when we've thanked you -- I'll be finished -- thank you -- thanks!

(Hurrah! "Fine!" "That's the stuff!" etc. from everybody.)

Amy

Spencer, that was a beautiful speech!
(Spencer flies to Amy. They go off in a corner and spoon some more.)

Beth

Really, aren't they too sweet together! I'm so happy for them.

Diantha

This seems a tame sort of a celebration, though. Why don't we motor down on the Island somewhere and make a night of it. I could stand a little jazz. And James Lawton won't turn in his grave -- in fact, he'd be rather relieved to see me acting naturally once again.

Tom
That's the stuff, Di. Great idea! How about it,
Amy and Spence -- Let's do it up brown !

Beth
Oh, but --

Tom
But what?

Beth
Well, couldn't we make it a nice cozy celebration
here? Look -- we can take up the rugs and we've
got lots of new records and I can get plenty of eats -

Doris
Yes - why not?

Tom
Great night no ! Amy and Spence deserve more than
just a home-grown celebration in their honor.
(They are spooning in the corner and not paying
much attention.)

Diantha
We can get to "The Red Goose" in about an hour -- the
music used to be pretty good there and --

Tom
Yes -- and all the liquor you want.

Greg
Should think it was much too late.

Tom
Aw, come on, Greg and Beth ! Do you both good and
we haven't had a big blow-out in a dog's age, have
we, E--?

Diantha
It'll do us all good. Clear the air!
(Takes Greg's arm, looking up at him easily)
Eh, Greggie, old dear?
(Greg just looks at her surprised and not pleased.)

Diantha
(Snatching her arm away quickly)
Humph, you needn't look as if I had the plague! Before
I'd be such glooms as you and Beth are-- ! Beth, why
don't you let this husband of yours do something he
wants to once in a while!

Beth
Why Diantha!

Tommy
Well, we're going anyhow. Come on, Spence and Amy and Doris and --

Amy
Where are we going?

Tommy
To "The Red Goose" to make a regular celebration !
Got enough gas, Spencer?

Spencer
Surest thing you know.

Amy
Oh how scrumptious!
(Jumping and running over to Doris and Beth)
Won't it be fun, Doris? Beth, I think you and Tom are too sweet for words to do this for us.
(Doris runs off)

Doris
I'll get your coat too, Beth !

Beth
Greg, I'll let you off. I know how you hate this sort of thing.

Greg
No, I'm going tonight.

Beth
I'd give anything if I didn't have to.

Greg
(Firmly)
But you do -- one night won't hurt.

Beth
It isn't that I mind going -- it's Di -- Oh, Greg, what has come over her -- and Tommy.

Greg
Hush ! you're to pretend not to notice a thing. I'll do your fighting for you -- I'll get back at her somehow -- Tommy'll come around.

Tommy

(Calling)
You two had better jazz into some coats if you're coming.

Greg

Right.
(He goes to hall left)

(Beth over by window looks out)

Beth

Really, people, it looks a lot like rain.

Tom

Bosh !

Diantha

The moon was out when we came in, wasn't it, Tommy boy?
(She gives him an enveloping look while he helps her on with her things, which he has brought on from hall when he went to get his own.)

Beth

(Still at window)
Well, Tommy, I think you'd better put the top up, anyhow.

Tommy

Nonsense! We'd never get started if we stopped to put up the three tops. Neither Greg's nor Spencer's is up.

Diantha

(Having primped and painted herself up at the mirror)
Well, I'm ready and it makes not the slightest particle of difference to me whether I get soaked or not.

Amy

Oh, I don't think it could possibly rain.

Beth

Still, it seems sort of senseless to me.

Greg

Beth's right, of course - Tom.

Tom

Oh but let's make a dash for it and have someone put them up out there.

Diantha

That's settled. Let's go. We can't stand here and argue about the weather all evening.

(She takes Tom's arm)

Tom

That's the stuff! We're off!

(Starts out)

You all follow along when you get ready. It's the Merrick Road, turn to your right at Garden City

(Exit Tom and Diantha)

(Beth looks askance. Doris has come back with her coat. Beth is powdering her nose at mirror Right.)

Amy

Come along, Spencer - or we'll lose the way.

Spencer

(Starting)

Gee, I know the way. Coming, Greg?

Amy

(As she goes out)

Hurry up, Doris and Beth!

(They exit)

Doris

(Over by door left)

Jazz yourself along there, Beth.

Greg

Yes, I'm not at all sure of the road.

(Beth starts across from Right)

Beth

(Stops -- with a break in her voice)

I can't go -- that's all there is about it -- I can't.

Greg

(To her side quickly with his arm around her)

Yes, you can. Buck up, Beth -- we've got to see this thing through!

Doris

(At her side)

Come on, Beth -- you mustn't be a Do-do bird and let her wing you at the first shot this way !

(They start her over to door)

And I'll bet you in a half an hour she'll be bored to death with Tommy !

Beth

(Pulls away from them both -- huffily)

Oh - you do, do you !

(She marches off.)

(Doris turns and looks at Greg. They both laugh and follow Beth off.)

C U R T A I N.

A C T I I

" T H E D E V I L F I G H T E R "

ACT II

SCENE

A large bare room; very dirty and dilapidated. Windows boarded up. Door blown in at back. Large old-fashioned mantle-piece and fire-place at Right. Doors both sides, Upper and Lower Right. Stairs facing audience are at Left, with door at Lower Left. There are some old bottles and a couple of old barrels and boxes about.

TIME

Same evening, about an hour later.

PLACE

Inside an old uninhabited house by the roadside.

AT RISE

Stage is bare, dark and storm rages outside. It is raining hard. After a pause, a WOMAN comes slowly down the stairs carrying a candle (no candle-stick) in her hand. She peers around carefully before she descends. She is ill-kept looking, thin and ragged. Her hair is all over her face. Though young, her face is haggard and she slouches badly as she goes across, peers out into the storm shielding her candle, then she slinks quickly into room right - Upper - closing door behind her. After a pause, an automobile is heard off-stage. Then the horn. Then the headlights flash head on into the room, lighting it up well. After another pause, DIANTHA comes running in through door. She is wet and disgusted looking, wrapped in the robe from the car. TOM follows quickly after her, even wetter.

DIANTHA

Is this the best place you could find?

TOM

I thought surely I saw a light.

Diantha

A light!! My God - in this hovel?! You must be crazy!

Tom

Well, at least it will keep you from getting soaked until I can get the top up.

Diantha

I am soaked already, thank you! What's the good of the top now? Of course, what you should have done was to stop back there when it first started.

Tom

(Contrite)

I am awfully sorry, Di, that I didn't, but I was so sure "The Red Goose" was just around the bend in the road.

Diantha

Yes, and it kept on being just around the bend until this is where you've landed me!

(Shivers) (Begins to walk up and down)

It is the dampest hole I ever set foot in and probably haunted, besides.

Tom

I wouldn't have it happen for anything with you, Di -- but the storm came up so suddenly I must have taken the wrong turning, and --

Diantha

Beth was right after all -- She always is -- that's the exasperating part of her!

Tom

I wonder if they all followed us and made the same mistake?
(Looks out at door)

Gosh, it sure is coming down! Hope they're better off than we are.

Diantha

Most anything would be better than this, but I guess they had sense enough to stop before they'd given themselves pneumonia --

(She coughs)

I should think, though, you could let them take care of themselves and worry a little bit about me!

(She sits huddled on a box. She has let the blanket go because it is so wet) (Tom comes over to her quickly)

Tom
Honestly, Di -- I'm worried to death about you, but I don't know what to do.

Diantha
(Seeing her opportunity)
You look worried, I must say! All you're thinking is whether Beth is getting her nose wet or not. But there's nobody to give me a thought any more. People think I don't miss Jim -- but --
(Squeezing out a tear)

Tom
(Putting his suit coat around her that he has taken off)
Please, Di -- don't. There are lots of us worrying about you and caring an awful lot, too!

Diantha
(Pushing coat off)
No - no -- you mustn't give me your coat. You'll catch your death, too!

Tom
Nonsense!

Diantha
Besides, the others may have followed us and Beth would see me in your coat, and think all the dreadful things she could possibly imagine!

Tom
(Firmly - Putting it on her again)
I don't care what Beth thinks! Only I'm not going to have you catch cold just because Beth chooses to be jealous!

Diantha
(Gloating inwardly)
Of course, it's simply absurd of her to be jealous of me!

Tom
Oh, I don't know!
(He is turned away)

Diantha
(Taking his hand - putting it to her face)
Well, if I thought my Tommy boy cared a little --?! Life wouldn't seem quite so dreary.

Tom
(Coming around quickly; to her, passionately)
I do. I do, Di -- more than a little!

Diantha
(Leading him on - looking up at him with a most enveloping look)
But yet that may not be very much? How much? Tell me how much you love me, Tommy?

Tom
More than I dare think, Di -- more than I --
(She lets him kiss her, long and hard)
(Before they finish, the Door at Right Upper comes open a little ways -- the lights from their auto are full on them. More lights appear. Voices are heard outside. They separate. The Door closes quickly.
(ELIZABETH comes in quickly, white-faced, staring ahead of her. She has seen them. Tommy half realizes it; is confused and embarrassed. Diantha doesn't care. Doris follows close on Beth's heels
So there you all are!

Doris
Not all -- Goodness knows what has become of those two spooners. Probably drowned and they don't know it! I thought that was your car, Tom, when we passed the first time. Great night. This is the hauntedest looking house that ever I did see. We'll have some time working off a celebration here.

Beth
(In a hollow voice)
They've had their celebration, Doris.

Doris
Well, believe me - I hope we don't have to celebrate here for long. It gives me the creeps!
(Starts poking around)

(GREG has come in, too)

Gregory
Lost your way, eh, Tommy?

Diantha
Well, we wouldn't exactly have picked this god-forsaken hole if we hadn't, Greg.

Gregory

I lost sight of you. Didn't even recognize the car when we first came by, but it's more deserted on ahead so we came back and -

Elizabeth

(Still in icy tones)

But we came too late, Greg!

Gregory

How's that?

Doris

What ever do you mean?

Elizabeth

(Coldly)

Diantha knows what I mean!

(Diantha shifts one foot and goes on smoking.)

(Horn is heard outside. More lights flash on. AMY and SPENCER call from outside. TOMMY rushes to door, relieved. Doris also.)

Tom

(Calls out)

Halloa!

Doris

I do believe it's Amy and Spencer.
(As they come up)

Tom

However did you get lost, too?

Spencer

Following you. If we hadn't been following so closely wouldn't have taken the wrong turning.

Doris

Don't you believe it! You're too much in love to know what turning you took. I suppose you're not even wet, Amy?

Amy

No, really -- hardly a bit.

Doris

(Feeling her coat)

Great night! Simply soaked that's all. Such is love!

Diantha

(After watching Beth and Gregory who are over Right. She joins that group)

But you had better buy raincoats just the same. Love is not guaranteed waterproof.

(Beth and Gregory have been talking earnestly and quietly. Beth much distressed. As others babble together in a group or back and left)

Beth

But I tell you, I saw them -- distinctly, as we drove up.

Gregory

Never mind. I tell you to forget that, too. If you show your feelings or make a scene, you only give them both more excuse.

Beth

Oh, Greg. how can I help it?

Gregory

Because you can't, you must! For God's sake, Beth, promise me to hold onto yourself until I have had a chance to see what I can do!

Beth

I don't see what you can do -- but oh, if you can - I was so happy and now it all seems crumbling -

Diantha

(Who has gone to window to look out)

Will it never stop raining! My God, we can't stay here all night.

Amy

Oh why not -- it would be such an adventure!

Doris

In this spooky, damp old place -- Deliver me!

(Gregory turns from Beth quickly)

Gregory

(Cheerfully)

Let's have a fire anyhow. Dry ourselves out.

Doris

Where - when, and how?

Gregory

In the fireplace.

(He gets one of the boxes and throws one to Tom)

Here, try your left on that.

(He starts jumping on his box)

Doris

(Up to him a bit coyly)

Oh, Greg, you are so clever!

Gregory

(In undertone to Doris)

Doris, want to put your vamping to some use? Try it on Tom. I'm going to try my hand at Diantha!

Doris

I'm on. But I wish you luck after the way you turned her down at the house.

(She has been leaning over him while he has been breaking kindling.)

Tommy

(At fireplace, with an old piece of candle he has found)

By George, here's some kind of fire laid here already.

(All come to look)

Doris

Oh, Tommy, how clever you are to discover that.

(She leans over to help him)

Beth

(Looking all about)

Do you suppose anybody lives in this ghastly place?

Gregory

No. Boys left that -- or some journeying tramp.

Amy

(Clapping her hands, bent on enjoying everything)

Tramps have been here -- oh how thrilling, Spencer!

Spencer

Gosh - tramps aren't thrilling -- they're just dirty.

Diantha

Spencer -- I fear me you said a mouthful.

Gregory

Hasn't anybody got any liquor on their hip?

Doris

(Leaning over)

Not on the hip - but!

(Pulls out small flask from stocking)

(All say "Hurrah!" etc.)

Diantha

Greg, that's the second brilliant thought you've had in the last five minutes. Have a heart and don't overwork that colossal cranium!

Tommy

Mine's not on the hip, either - but I've got some in the car.

(Starting out, throwing a coat over himself)

Don't know why I didn't think of it myself.

Spencer

(Going likewise)

Same here!

Diantha

(Strolling over to fire near Gregory)

Doesn't the famous Dr. Blair carry any for emergency?

Gregory

(Shakes his head)

(Making up his mind finally, forcing an agreeable attitude. Over to her quietly)

Di, always knew you were clever - but I have to take my hat off to your latest brilliant tactics.

Diantha

What's up now?

Gregory

Had to explain to Beth because she didn't see through your little scheme -

Diantha

Scheme, eh?

(Spencer and Tom come dashing back)

Spencer

(Carries flask)

Gosh - gee -- that's some rain !

Tom

(Dashing after him also with large flask)

Don't think it's ever going to let up !

Amy

Is it still raining?

Doris

Oh no -- somebody's just wringing out their clothes on the roof.

Diantha

(Quietly to Gregory)

What are you getting at, Greg? It isn't like you to talk in riddles.

Gregory

Rather embarrassing to me, though, to have to explain.

Tom

(He has a tin cup of some sort -- is over left pouring out a drink, starts across but Doris blocks his way)

Here, Di, this will warm you up.

Doris

(Taking it away from him)

Oh do let me take it to Mrs. Jimmie.

(She runs across with it)

Diantha

Such attention, Doris. I'm quite overcome, but if you spill so much as a drop --

(She takes and drinks it down straight without a pause.)

Gregory

You finished that like a soldier.

(Diantha gives cup back to Doris who goes quickly back to Tom)

(Spencer is giving some to Beth and Amy at other side of fireplace, upstage R.)

Doris

Now, Tom, be careful, don't let me get too happy -- there's no telling what I might do.

(He has poured some out for her. She looks up at him with large innocent eyes.)

I might even get so bold as to try to vamp you !

(She sips it slowly. Tommy is anxiously watching Diantha)

Diantha

Do you intend disclosing this embarrassing matter?

Gregory

Well, I'd better warn you. It's obvious to everybody why you're making a dead set at Tom.

Diantha

Oh, it is, is it?

(Doris is still trying to vamp Tom. He has just had a drink himself, is trying to get to Diantha)

Tom

Di -- how about another little one?

Diantha

Not yet, thanks, Tommy boy !

(Softly to Gregory)

What is so obvious, may I ask?

Gregory

If all this is not to make me jealous, what can it mean? You've declared often enough in public how poor old Tom bores you.

Diantha

Oh I have, have I?

Gregory

(Leaning back and looking at her appraisingly)
I'm really beastly flattered, old girl, but, of course, I shouldn't admit it.

Diantha

(Placidly)

I had forgotten you were such an ingenuous soul, Greg!

Doris

(To Tom, very bewitchingly)
Tommy, I never realized before tonight how fascinating you are!

Tom

Quit your kidding, Doris.
(Keeps looking over towards Diantha and fidgeting)

Doris

(On the job and working hard)
Oh, but I'm not kidding. I mean every word I say. Straight from the shoulder, Doris -- that's me! I think Beth's the luckiest girl I know.

Gregory

Di, do you remember that first dance I took you to?

Diantha

Yes, your mother made you do it.

Gregory

Wasn't I sorry after I got there. You were looking very beautiful that night.

Diantha

It was the first time I had my hair up, I must have been a sight.

Gregory

No -- I always think of you that way.

Diantha

Always? You know you never let yourself think of me.

Gregory

(Obviously winningly)
Can't afford to, Di, my work would suffer too much.

Diantha

Suppose you'd say that's the reason you've been so beastly cruel to me the last few years?

Gregory

Partly to protect myself, I confess -- it's true.
(Watches her carefully)

Diantha

Kind of a mean trick to protect yourself at my expense -- thought you had more will power than that.

Gregory

(Full of meaning and trumped up emotion)
Ha! what chance have I if I let you get started?

Diantha

I wonder!

(Doris is still trying all her arts out on Tommy who is still watching for an opportunity to get to Diantha. The other three have been watching the storm and talking by window, Right, center.)

Amy

Oh, everybody! Spencer has a pack of cards. Let's play something. Come on, Doris and Tom.

Doris

Oh dear me -- that's a priceless idea. Oh Tommy!
(Takes his arm and leads him over to others.)

Tom

Sure thing!

Beth

Don't you want to play, Greg?
(As she sits on floor by others in front of fire)
What shall it be -- hearts?

Tom

(Breaks away and goes to Di)
How about it, Di -- going to play? I'll get this box for you to sit on?

Diantha

No, Tommy, run along. It would bore me excessively.
(As she starts across to left)
Besides I'm perishing of the heat there by that fire.

Gregory

And, Tom, the old folks are reminiscing so you mustn't disturb them.

Tom

(Disgusted)
Are you trying to give me the razz, Greg?
(Flings himself down on floor between Doris and Amy)

Diantha

(To Gregory who leans over her as she sits on box at left. He lights her cigarette)
You know, I'm not at all sure that you aren't giving me the razz, Greg.

Gregory

(Taking his time -- as he lights his own cigarette)
Not my habit, you know.

Diantha

(Becoming quite pleased with Gregory's attentions)
You don't deny it, though?

Gregory

Why? When I'm so palpably in earnest.

Diantha

Still this is not at all like you, old dear.

Gregory

I admit it. But -- it suddenly came over me tonight -- why not ease up on the old work and have a fling? Either you breathe the widow's weeds -- something broke down the barriers for a flash -- and I rather liked the glimpse beyond.

Diantha

I always thought you could be fascinating when you wanted to -- but -- why me -- there are others you were paying more attention to.

(The group on the floor have found some old candles and have stuck them in bottles, are busily playing.)

Beth

(Looking up frightened)
I know I saw that door move.

Tom

Sure, the wind!

Gregory

(Looks around, then laughing forcedly)
You mean. Doris -- poor little thing. Pathetic -- so much pep and no brains.
(Looks around to see if anybody is listening. They are all talking and laughing over their game.)

No, guess maybe -- we were both playing our own little game. Fact is, Di - couldn't seem to swallow your wasting yourself that way on such fallow ground as slow old Tom -- I always have appreciated the extent of your charms - you know that.

Di

(Quite won over)

But - they have never meant anything to you, Greg.

Greg

Is it too late?

Di

You ask that?

Greg

For me to mean anything to you?

Di

You mean that?

Greg

(He quickly looks at others, sees them busily occupied. Takes up Di's hand, assuming a controlled passion, looks down into her upturned face.)

How can I wear anything else? How can I keep away from you any longer -- if it means work -- friends -- everything -- I shall have to give them up to you, Diantha!

(He leans over further. She slowly raises her lips to his, but as they are about to kiss, she suddenly shrinks away, starts up in a fury)

Diantha

You're lying to me, Greg Blair. I could see it in your eyes. You didn't mean a word you said -- you could make your lips say what you didn't mean -- but your eyes gave you away! You're doing all this to keep me away from Tommy -- you're lying to protect Beth! Ha! A fine gentleman's trick -- I see through your little scheme all right -- the whole of it! I admit I was taken in for a while, but I let myself be -- poor simp that I am -- To ever waste a thought on such a cad as you!

(The others have stopped playing cards and Tom is telling the ghost story now. They are bent over listening silently so don't pay any attention to Greg or Di who is way over down left)

Greg

(With pent up fury as he comes over to her almost menacingly)

Call me anything you like but -- behave yourself! -- leave your hands off Beth's husband. For I'll never leave you a moment's peace. You have power - but you have no conception of the strength of mine when I get started!

(She shrinks from him, terrified of his power. He relaxes, turns away; she regains her control.)

Di

(Swaggering by him over to others)

Ha! That was a clever bit of acting, Greg -- I'll have to hand you that. Why don't you go into the movies!

(The group on the floor are all intent upon the story Doris is telling with much color and verve)

Amy

(Suddenly shrieking out and clutching Spencer)

Oh, I'm frightened!

Diantha

What's this? A ghost story!

Tommy

(Looking up)

Oh, Greg's let you off, has he? You've returned to the kindergarten.

(He makes room for her.)

(With a look at Greg, sits down by Tommy)

(Greg continues smoking over left. Doris goes on.)

Doris

And as he felt his way, step by step, in the dark, empty house, suddenly something hit him in the face. He gasped inwardly until he almost choked and felt of the thing that dangled before him -- it was a hand - limp -- cold --

Amy
Oh, stop -- it's awful !

Beth
I know -- I saw a hand at that door -
(Points back Right)

(The wind howls -- thunder and lightning -- a door blows closed upstairs.)

Beth
(Jumping up)
There -- hear that!

Amy
(Clutching Spencer who is trying to get up)
I was never so frightened in my life!
(Tommy has gone over left, looking up staircase, listening)

Tom
It can't hear anything.

Greg
A door banged to in the wind.
(Diantha has gotten up, Doris follows.)

Tom
(To Beth)
See, it was nothing -- and now you've spoilt everything.

Beth
I don't care. I never felt so creepy in my life. I just know there's somebody in this house beside us!

Diantha
That's a poisonous idea, Beth. You have too much imagination.

Amy
Oh, Spencer! I think there is too.

Doris
Sweet cookie! Don't you two be such Do-do birds! That was only a story that I made up.
(The wind is still howling around)

Greg

(Has gone into room left with his flash, comes out shutting door)

See -- there's no one in there, Beth.

Doris

(Has gone back left, looks in room back there)

No one here!

(She crosses over to upper door, Right)

(Diantha is making a fuss over Tom in the center of stage. Beth is left by stairs. Greg has started up.)

Diantha

(Holding Tom's lapel)

Didums think it was abused!

Doris

(Peering into room R. upper. She pushes door slowly)

No one.

(She takes a step. The door swings closed. She is on the inside.)

(Spencer starts in to room down Right)

Amy

(Dragging him back with terror)

No - Spencer! Don't leave me!

(Diantha is all but kissing Tom in centre of stage. Greg half way up stairs looks down on them with fury. Beth turns, is aghast. A piercing scream is heard from upper right. All stand, frozen to their spots. Greg jumps over bannister to door from where scream was heard. Tom after him.)

(Amy has sunk to her knees in terror clinging to Spencer so he can't move.)

Diantha

(Looking around)

Who is it?

Beth

(Suddenly coming to her senses)

Oh my God - Doris!

(She runs across to door as Greg and Tom carry the limp form of Doris out into the center of the room.)

(Beth is at her side as they stretch her on the floor.)

Diantha

What is it, Greg?

Greg

Stabbed in the chest.

(Amy goes into hysterics)

Some whisky !

(Spencer and Tom both offer it)

You two - search in there. Don't let them escape.

(Both start quickly with flashes.)

Amy

If you leave me, Spencer, I shall die.

Diantha

Oh shut up, Amy !

(Diantha is holding Doris's head while Greg gives her some whiskey. Also he pours whiskey on handkerchief and wipes wound. Beth has opened Doris's blouse in front.)

Beth

Greg -- Greg - now -- will she --?

Greg

Nasty wound -- not deep though. She'll be all right if we get her to a hospital.

Doris

(Has come to, weakly with a little smile)

Great night! What's all the fuss about -- I'm all right.

Greg

Surely you are. Just a scratch.

Beth

Oh, Doris, does it hurt?

Diantha

What happened, Doris?

(Greg motions them to be quiet as he takes her pulse. Amy has come over to her also.)

Doris
Greg, is that you holding my hand?

Greg
(Satisfied about the pulse, slips his hand
around hers.)
Yes -- it is.

Doris
(Sinks back with a faint smile)
Bring on your knives! I can stand anything now.
(Tom and Spencer come rushing out of room)

Tom
How is she?

Spencer
(At the same time)
Say -- that place is sealed tight and there is not so
much as a rat to be seen.

Tom
All boarded up and no one any place.

Greg
Are you sure?

Beth
Strange!

Diantha
Weird!

Any
You see, There are such things as ghosts.

Spencer
Quite some ghost to ~~me~~ that knife.
(He throws a small vegetable knife to Greg.)

Greg
That's it!

Diantha
Nothing but an old vegetable knife.
(Shivers)

Any
Oh, let's get away from here.

Greg

Then there's more room in your car. You drive Doris to the Magistrate at Garden City at once. Beth and Diantha'll have to sit in back and keep her from getting too jolted. Spencer, you and Amy drive like hell, get there ahead so they can have things ready.

Spencer

I'm on. Come Amy.

(He fairly picks Amy off her feet and they dash out. Sound of motor and they are gone. Greg and Tom have lifted up Doris. They start out with her)

Greg

(To others)

Bring those coats and rugs.

(Diantha and Beth pick them up - they start to door - Diantha starts to put her arm around Beth - Beth shrinks back. Diantha flings her head in the air and follows others quickly. Beth totters a minute, leans up against doorway, crying softly as if she couldn't control herself any longer) GREG comes back quickly)

Beth you're ----- Here, here what's the trouble!

Beth

(Clinging to him)

(Through her tears)

Greg, what are you going to do?

Greg

Stay here.

Beth

Oh, no. What for -

Greg

Can't leave a thing like this unsolved. Must catch the fiend that could do such a dastardly thing.

Beth

But, Doris -

Greg

She'll be all right. I couldn't do anything after I got to the hospital. Now you hurry along. You can help her.

Beth

But suppose something happens. Oh Greg, what would I do if anything happened to you?

Greg

Nothing's going to happen to me! Come sister, keep a stiff upper lip! Tell Tom to notify the police in case this person has escaped already.

(TOM calls)

Tom

Come on Beth!

Beth

Yes. Greg, but, Oh, I can't bear to leave you here alone!

(She goes out quickly)

(He stands watching them start. As the head lights go, the room gets much darker. There are only the dim lights from his car now. He turns, feels for his pistol, puts on the flashlight, and goes into room at Right)

CURTAIN

BOND
HAMMILL

THE DEVIL FIGHTER

ACT III

ACT III

PLACE:

Same as Act II.

TIME:

About fifteen or twenty minutes later.

When curtain goes up stage is dark except for the dim light from Greg's car and they are not on full as others have been. After a pause GREG comes slowly down the stairs, flashing his light about in the room as he comes. All the doors are shut and no one is to be seen. He picks up his coat that is on the floor, slowly; looks about again, crosses to front door, stands there while he lights a cigarette. As he turns in out of the wind, he notices the door Right upper start to open slowly. He puts out his match quickly and stands there. Slowly the ragged woman seen before appears. She is looking for something on the floor as she comes forward slowly.

Greg

(Puts light on her)

Who's there?

(She gives a stifled scream and cowers back from the lights.)

(Greg comes forward)

You did it -- you hag!

(Slowly uncovering her face with her hands, looking up at him. A fiendish light has come into her eyes and there is a sickly grin on her face.)

Woman

(Gloatingly)

Yes, I did it!

(Laughs in crazed manner)

She's dead at last and I did it -- I did it! Now I want my knife. I lost it. I must have my knife. I need it! I haven't finished with it yet! You must have it. You're keeping it from me. You've got it and you won't give it to me!

(He stands aghast watching her as she comes nearer to him)

It isn't yours, it's mine!

(In a wheedling tone)

Nice, kind gentleman -- give knife -- pretty knife -- all red -- to poor woman! You can get plenty of knives -- that's my only one -- I found it! Found it! Ha, ha -- no, no I didn't steal it. I didn't steal -- I'm still honest, but I want my knife! I need --

(He grabs her suddenly, puts light close to her face looking at her searchingly.)

Greg

Who are you? Where do you come from? What are you doing here?

Woman

(She suddenly shrinks away during a lucid moment, half covering her face)

I don't know.

Greg

(Forcefully coming closer)

Why did you want to kill that girl?

Woman

(Crouching sulkily in corner)

I don't know.

Greg

What could you have against that innocent young life?

Woman

(Revengefully)

She wasn't innocent -- she wasn't young; she's old -- old as I am, but she looked -- ha -- how beautiful she looked! I'm beautiful -- aren't I?

(Laughs harshly)

(Wailing)
Oh give me back the knife, so I can get out of this misery at last.

(Greg looks very puzzled and interested. Slowly he makes up his mind for his line of action.)

Greg
(Trying to calm her and lead her to box Right, getting one for himself to sit beside her.)
If I give you back your knife in a few minutes, would you sit here and talk with me first?

Woman
(Starting to sit, stops)
You're not a policeman?

Greg
No, nor a detective. Nothing to do with the law.

Martha
(With more horror than ever)
You're not a doctor?

Greg
(Starts, looks away, then slowly lies very convincingly)
Why - no, no, of course. I'm not a doctor.

Martha
(Suspiciously)
They didn't send you?

Greg
No, one sent me. I came with all the rest of those people that took refuge here from the storm -- then after the accident --

Martha
(Bitterly)
It wasn't an accident.

Greg
But wouldn't you really be relieved if I told you you hadn't killed the girl -- just wounded her -- and that she will recover.

Martha

(Bursting out again half crazed)

No, no, no ! Don't let her recover! She deserved to die -- long, long ago she should have died. She took more than my life from me. It was a just fate that brought her here tonight.

(Breaks)

Oh don't tell me I didn't kill her -- don't tell me she's not gone forever where she can't harm me or anybody else any more?

Greg

But what great harm could this woman have done you --

Martha

(Sullenly)

She was beautiful!

Greg

(Half to himself, trying to puzzle things out)

Beauty again !

(Walks away -- to himself)

Gad, what can it mean !

(Turns quickly)

Tell me -- do you live in this place?

Martha

(Not paying any attention -- to herself, muttering)

She was beautiful. I never blamed him -- not all this time have I blamed him. But she wanted him and she took him !

Greg

Do you mean your husband?

Martha

(Sullen again)

I don't know.

Greg

Do you mean that this woman took your husband away from you and that's why you hate her so?

Martha

He couldn't help it, could he? Say it wasn't his fault -- say it. It was my fault for not being pretty myself.

Greg

And this other woman, what was her name?

Martha

I don't know.

Greg

(Excited)

Listen to me! This woman that took your husband away from you -- the one that you thought you were killing, tonight -- this woman's name -- was it Diantha?

Martha

Diantha? Ha -- of course! Diantha!

Greg

(Has come closer and is staring at her fixedly, finally grabs her with both hands.)

Martha Lawton -- Martha Lawton! It is you! You didn't drown yourself then? You escaped -- and you've been living in these wretched extremities for months -- years! My God -- it was a just fate indeed that brought us here tonight!

Martha

(Bewildered)

Martha Lawton -- Martha Law -- you called me that? No, no! You mustn't know me! No one must know me any more!

Greg

(Putting his hand on her gently)

Don't you remember me, -- Martha Lawton? Don't you remember Greg Blair?

Martha

(Still with her hands covering her face)

No, no -- I don't remember anybody -- I don't want to remember anybody. Nobody understood.

Greg

But I understood. I was your friend -- your doctor -- Dr. Greg --

Martha

Doctor?

(Jumps up, starts for door Left)

No, no -- I don't know any doctor --

(He bars her way)

Get out of my way -- you've come to look me up again!

(Pounds his chest)

Let me by -- you shan't lock me up behind bars. I got away!

I'm free -- free -- let me go !
(She is exhausted.)

Greg
(Taking hold of her gently, but firmly leads her back to seat.)
I haven't come to lock you up. Nobody shall lock you up again -- but if you will just take time, think hard -- remember back -- wasn't there one -- a friend -- even though he was a doctor? You used to say that he understood. You told him all your thoughts -- you even seemed to be a little fond of him.

Martha
I don't know.

Greg
But this friend that you liked once upon a time -- you knew him out West -- before -- before you came East.

Martha
(Trying to think)
There was somebody -- great and tall and big -- it wasn't so bad when he was around -- but he went away -- away to fight -
(Passes her hand over her forehead)
Where was it they all went to fight?

Greg
To France.

Martha
Yes -- to France.

Greg
But why didn't you wait for him to come back, so he could help you more?

Martha
They told me he would never come back, -- I knew he would never come back -- out of all that blood-shed --

Greg
But he did -- I did come back, Martha. Don't you recognize me as that old friend of yours?
(She is now searching his face eagerly)
Don't you?

(She turns her head away still looking blank,
then suddenly a light dawns in her eyes.)

Martha

(She turns back to him slowly)
He did come back -- my friend -- my --

Greg

Your "good old stand-by Greg," you used to call him.

Martha

(Repeating slowly)
Greg -- my good old stand-by, Greg.
(Starts crying)
No, no -- you can't be just the same Greg after all
these years -- five, ten or twenty. I don't know --
it's been so long, and -

Greg

It has only been three years. I am the same Greg,
and you are the same Martha.

Martha

(Crying miserably)
I know that's not true. Oh if you really are Greg,
I can't bear to have you see me this way -- I can't
bear it.

Greg

(Patting her gently)
You poor child -- poor child. What have you been doing
all this time? Where have you lived -- how? If I had
only guessed, I would have sought to the ends of the
earth to find you!

Martha

(Still crying)
I didn't want anybody to find me -- I was so afraid.
So afraid they would lock me up again. It only made
me worse to be locked up that way. When I couldn't
stand it any longer -- after they took my baby away
from me --

(With a wild look)

You must know -- where is my baby -- what have they
done with her?

Greg

The baby died, Martha.

Martha

Died. They never told me. Why didn't they tell me.

Greg

They didn't want to upset you, I suppose. They thought you had forgotten.

Martha

Forget -- as if any woman could forget her baby? All these years I've wondered and worried. I've hardly been able to bear the thought that somebody else was taking care of her.

Greg

But how -- how in God's name have you lived?

Martha

I don't know. I didn't care. I got away -- that's all I cared. Saw my chance to escape -- borrowed some clothes and what money I had -- left the clothes I had on by the water. You get pretty crafty, you know. And somehow I didn't have the courage to do the real thing. Then I started to tramp -- Well, I've tramped and camped and worked a little in the different towns and villages -- always moving on -- on -- just existing -- always expecting from day to day to get strength enough to do away with myself, then being kept from it always by the hope of some-day seeing my child. I've stayed here a good while -- no one seemed to bother or care -- and I liked this old house, sort of lonely and haunted like myself.

Greg

But where -- where were you when we searched?

Martha

There's a board in there -- fits well -- nobody could find it -- I discovered by accident. It covers up an old wine cellar or something. I sleep down there.

(He shudders)

It gave me a safe and secure feeling. All I want is to be left alone -- left alone -- I don't care about anything any more. I've stopped caring -- stopped being tormented by going over everything in my mind -- going over -- was beginning to forget -- forget! No -- but it was all getting dulled and far away when -- suddenly I caught a glimpse of her -- tonight! It all came back. I was frantic! I found that old knife -- I watched! I waited! I was beside myself -- I didn't have courage to come out here and then somehow she came in there --

Greg

Martha -- that wasn't Diantha that went in there.
She was here -- but it was somebody else who went
there.

Martha

Oh my God!

Greg

It will be all right. She will live.

Martha

(Sullenly)

I don't care. Whoever it was, was pretty, wasn't
she? All of them are wantons!

(Change)

Oh no, no I don't mean that -- I don't mean that.
I don't know what I'm saying! I don't care any more -
and if it hadn't been such a night and so strange
for her to come here, I wouldn't have lost control --
I -- But it seemed as if she had been sent and I
struck and -- not at her! Oh!

(She covers her face with her hands)

I couldn't see -- I suppose I didn't know what I was
doing.

(A motor has been heard outside, lights, and
then voices. Martha doesn't hear it at first
but when she does, crouches away and starts
to escape. Greg to her side quickly)

Greg

No, no, please, Martha, for God's sake, don't go. I'll
never find you again!

(He holds her by door Right standing in front,
shielding her from sight of others.)

(Others come in quickly, DIANTHA in lead, BETH
and TOMMY follow.)

Diantha

Amy and Spencer are with Doris. Doctor says she had
a close call but she'll be O.K. We came back after you.

Beth

(Over to him)

I made them bring me -- if you won't come, I'm going
to stay with you.

Diantha

This is all utter nonsense, Greg.

(Spying Martha)

My God! who'se that?

Greg

(Slowly, as Martha crouches, trying to hide her face. He speaks with meaning and purpose.)
It is someone you ought to know, Diantha!

(As others watch, Martha uncovers her face. The fiendish light comes into her eyes. She turns, takes one look at Diantha, then with a shriek and hissing "Diantha!" she rushes at her. Greg holds her back. Diantha shrinks, cowering. Beth and Tom stand fixed to their spots.)

Martha

(Struggling with Greg)

Let me go -- let me go!

(He holds her back by arms but she faces Diantha menacingly)

Let me at her I tell you! Why should she live! She killed me and left my tortured soul still in my body!

Diantha

The woman's mad -- take her away!

Martha

I may be mad, but you will have to answer for that before your God!

Greg

She is not mad. She is telling you the truth.

Diantha

Take her away, I say, or let me out!
(Turns to go)

Greg

(Quickly and sternly)

Don't you move, Howard! Diantha has too much to answer for to be allowed to escape this.

Diantha

My God, what's it all about?

Tommy

Who is she?

Greg

(Slowly)

She is Martha Lawton.

(Diantha starts and turns ghastly pale, others all exclaim. Elizabeth covers her face with hands. Tommy comes forward and looks at her more closely. Greg has let go of Martha, who stands in the center, her head bowed as if crushed.)

Martha

(Turns quickly, points at Diantha but doesn't go nearer her.)

Yes, the name of Lawton's mine. Mine! You have no right to it and you know it. You thief! To steal money -- jewels is bad enough, but to be a thief of souls -- to be a torturer of minds -- there is no vengeance too great! You stole him -- my husband, away. What have you done with him?

(She looks around from face to face -- they bow their heads.)

Martha

(Laughing hysterically)

Oh he's gone? You got tired of him and you let him die? It doesn't matter now! I have no love left for any one -- only hate -- hate for you with your looks and your wiles! You had the advantages -- you used them. I couldn't fight for a man's love. I'm not that kind. I had to sit and eat my heart out and smile while I saw him -- the man I loved -- saw him toyed with -- saw his life slip gradually, bit by bit, from mine! Felt that great jagged crack across my heart widen -- widen! Night and day -- this thing haunted me while I racked my brains for ways and means to keep my hold on life and him! And all the time I was carrying my baby -- his baby -- and you knew that too! Would to God some day you may lie writhing in the pangs of child-birth -- alone -- without your man to lean upon. Then perhaps you'll know! Perhaps you'll understand. Perhaps they'll call you a lunatic too -- perhaps they'll lock you up in an insane asylum, too! Behind bars -- helpless -- eating those broken bits of your heart out little by little -- and your child -- your baby taken from your very breast because you're not -- safe! How would you; with your dashing ways and your glossy hair and your pretty face stand that? There's no justice left in the world!

(Comes nearer menacing again)

While such as you are left free to prey and suck and gorge and throw aside till your very guts are ready to burst!

(Diantha has not known which way to turn, hemmed in as she is by the rest. She shudders and writhes, finally covers her face with her hands and sinks slowly to the ground on her knees. Finally she breaks down sobbing.)

Diantha

Take her away -- take her away -- for God's sake, have some mercy, Greg!

Elizabeth
 (Runs to Greg, sobbing)
 Oh, Greg!

Greg
 Mercy? You ask mercy of me?

Diantha
 (Turns to Tom who is standing in doorway)
 Take me away, Tom!

Tom
 (Sternly)
 Greg's orders.

Diantha
 Let me by -- let me by then!

Tom
 (Same)
 Greg's orders.

Diantha
 (Turns, looks around)
 God, haven't I got a friend in the world?

Greg
 Let her go now, Howard -- but you stay here -- I have
 something to settle with you and it's going to be now.
 (Handing Elizabeth a flashlight and pointing to
 door down Right)
 Elizabeth, take Martha into that room -- shut the door!

Elizabeth
 What is it, Greg? What's going to happen?
 (Diantha has collected herself and gotten to door,
 turns.)

Diantha
 (Venomously)
 This is a put up job of yours, Gregory Blair! I don't
 believe that's Martha Lawton. I'll get even with you
 somehow. Survival of the fittest, that's the law of
 humanity -- you'll see!

Greg
 (Quietly)
 If any God above adjudged you the fittest -- there
 wouldn't be any humanity.
 (She goes.)

Greg

(Pointing again)
In there, Elizabeth.

Elizabeth

But, Greg --

(He points; she goes leading Martha. He shuts door after them)

(Greg turns quickly, faces Tommy, starts taking off his coat.)

Greg

Take off your coat!

Tommy

(Starting)

God, Greg -- what is it?

Greg

You've seen that wreck of a woman in there -- well then, you've seen to what end you're driving Elizabeth!

I'll not let my sister sink into such misery without a fight!

(Tommy stares)

Take off your coat. I'll make you feel the aches and pains on your body that you're inflicting on her mind. Then perhaps you may hesitate before you continue to ruin her life. For by the Gods, I'll hunt you out and leave you no peace if you torture her much longer.

(Tom hangs his head)

Do you think Elizabeth and you are any different from Martha and Jim Lawton! Do you imagine Martha's an exceptional case? There are hundreds of them! Do you think you have any right to ruin any woman's life, much less the one you have taken for life to cherish and protect? A fine kind of honor that is. What makes you any different from the beasts! For a passing emotion or two you throw away your heritage!

Tommy

But --

Greg

Don't make any excuses. You know well enough you can't make out to be the inane figure of a hen-pecked husband. Elizabeth's not exacting -- not narrow -- not whining.

(Tommy has turned away.)

(Fiercely)

Well, we're going to get a little justice in this game now if I have to fight you till I knock you out.

(He kicks barrel and boxes aside)

(Tommy slowly takes off his coat, comes forward, meets Greg's gaze.)

Tommy

(Straight, with head thrown back)

I'm willing to take my punishment, Greg. But --

Greg

(Hissing)

But what?

Tommy

I know I deserve it -- that's all. A man can't fight very well when he knows he's in the wrong and agrees to it before he starts.

Greg

(Relaxes, throws up his hands)

Of course, if that's the way you feel about it now! But -- how long is it going to last?

Tommy

(With feeling)

As long as that vision of Martha Lawton remains in my memory --

(Shudders)

And I feel too sure it will be forever. Greg, is there nothing you can do for her?

Greg

(Pulling himself together -- convinced)

I'll attend to that. You get your coat on and take Elizabeth home. You've got her to worry about, and remember this -- she's worth it!

Tommy

Yes. I see now -- she's been too patient with me.

(Greg goes to door, opens and calls in)

Greg

Beth!

(Elizabeth comes to door, Martha behind her, stands in doorway.)

Elizabeth

(Looking terrified)

What is it, Greg?

(Going to him.)

Greg
Tommy is ready to take you home.

Tommy
(Coming across to her)
Will you go with me now, Beth - after -

Elizabeth
(Going over to him)
Oh, Tommy dear -- I can't be any different than I ever have been so tell me now if you really want me or let me go in peace --

Tommy
(Grabs her to him holding her tightly)
Never - I'll never let you go -- I've been such a fool.
(She is crying in his arms. They turn and start out. Martha has been watching them, in a daze, covers her face with her hands and chokes back a sob but they don't notice her. Greg follows them. Elizabeth turns and kisses him at the door. They go out. He stands watching them. Their motor is heard as they go. Martha starts pacing back and forth wildly. Greg turns and sees her. Comes forward slowly watching her. He stands there for quite a pause while she paces.)

Martha
(Coming to him, quickly catching hold of him)
What are you going to do with me?

Greg
(He shakes his head slowly, goes over right, where he sits heavily)
I don't know -- I don't know!
(She walks away, comes back quickly.)

Martha
Give me the knife-- give me my knife, I say! That's the only thing to do-- Please, for God's sake, quickly, before my courage leaves me.

Greg
(Putting his hand on her trying to calm her)
That's not the only way, Martha.

Martha
Yes, yes! I should have done it long ago!

Greg

No, Martha, no. If you've fought the fight so far you must finish it out.

Martha

But now, - the police -- !

Greg

I can handle them. No, for the present I'll take you to Dr. Sutherland's sanitarium, where you can rest and --

Martha

(With growing horror)

No, no, no ! Better Mattewan where I could go completely mad than any half-way measures. No, no -- have a little pity !

Greg

(Trying to calm her)

But, Martha, there you would get rest and quiet and soon be yourself again.

Martha

Never! Shut up with other sick people -- I couldn't stand it -- I couldn't! I would feel myself slide back -- back into those black shadows -- what incentive have I now to fight continually and incessantly?

Greg

My God -- you tie my hands! I don't know what I am to do !

(A motor cycle has been heard, indistinctly and not noticed by Greg and Martha. Suddenly there is a quick step on the porch and a policeman appears in doorway. He flashes his light about room.)

Policeman

Who's here?

(Martha is in the shadow. Greg steps forward)

Greg

I am one of the party who was with the young woman that was stabbed. Stayed on to see if I could discover the person who did it -- or find some clue.

Policeman

What's your name?

Greg

Dr. Gregory Blair, New York.
(Gives him his card.)

Policeman

(Takes card, writes in notebook)
That's all right, Doctor. They gave me your name back at headquarters, when they phoned. Whew! this has been some storm, I'll say. And now we have a little attempted murder to add to the excitement. Sure' n they all say around here that this house is haunted and -
(Spies Martha)
Hullo ! who's this?

Greg

(Turning quickly giving Martha sign to keep still, then turning back)
Some poor wretch of a woman we frightened. She had also taken refuge here out of the storm.

Policeman

(Coming nearer, looking at her intently)
What's your name?

Greg

(Intercepting him)
I think she told me it was Mary Carson.
(He looks at her. She terrified, assents.)

Policeman

(Writing)
Mary Carson -- where do you come from?

Greg

Huntington -- didn't you say?
(She assents)

Policeman

(Writes)
Came here out of the storm, eh? What were you walking the roads at night for?

Greg

The storm started pretty early down here, didn't it Sergeant? I believe she --

Policeman

(Breaking gruffly)
Look here, let that woman speak for herself.

Greg

All right. But you can't get much out of her.
It's taken all my patience in the last half hour to
learn what I just told you.

Policeman

Well -- we'd better take her to headquarters, then.
They'll make her talk there.
(Martha gasps)

Greg

(Holding onto himself with great effort)
If you leave her here, with me, I think I'll have more
success. This is my job -- handling people of this
sort. I am naturally as anxious to find the criminal
as you are.

Policeman

But suppose she gets away from us?

(Firmly)

Greg

You can hold me accountable -- I won't let her get away.
I know your chief in New York -- give him that card,
-- it'll be all right.

Policeman

Well -- that may be better as I haven't the side car
on my cycle. These jays round here are close mouthed.
She doesn't look as if she had the strength to wield
any kind of weapon, but she may know something. Have
you looked through these rooms?

(Greg nods)

Well, I'll give 'em the once over myself -- just to satisfy
the Captain.

(Starts in right, hurriedly)

Whoever it was has all the time in the world to make their
get-away. And this black night would cover the devil
himself.

(Martha clings to Greg)

(Policeman goes to door down Right, flashing his
light into room)

Policeman

(As he crosses left)

Don't care much for these here haunted houses -- tain't
in my line!

(He looks in room left, then goes upstairs
quickly.)

Martha

(Clinging to Grey desperately)
Don't let him take me! Don't!

Greg

No - but keep absolutely still.
(After a pause, the policeman comes down)

Policeman

Empty as a tomb! Well, see what you can do with her, Doc, then you'd better bring her in, in your car and leave her at headquarters.

Greg

(Firmly)
I'll be responsible.

Policeman

All right. That lady's going to live, I guess, but - this woman may be off her head and we don't want any maniacs around here stabbing anybody they come across! So long!

(Goes out quickly. Exit Policeman)

(After they hear him go.)

Martha

Maniac! That's what they'll all call me! If you knew what it meant to be considered that you would use that knife and put me out of my misery at once. It's the only kind thing to do, Greg!

Greg

No, no, Martha. That will not do, I say. I've thought of the way. I know what's to be done now. But - we must get away from here first -- we must start at once!

Martha

(Dazed)

Get away? But where? Where are you going to take me? Where is there a place for me? Oh, Greg, you'll leave me -- you'll leave me someplace where they won't understand. Let me die.

Greg

I'm not going to leave you, Martha. We're going together.

Martha

Yes, but --

Greg

(Gently)

Together for always. Will you mind so very much, do you think, when you are happy again and the world is bright and gay -- do you think you could stand having me about all the time --

Martha

(Slowly, half realizing)

What -- what do you mean?

Greg

I mean, Martha, I believe I can make you happy -- and I'm going to take a gambler's chance and try it.

Martha

But, I don't understand.

Greg

I have always loved you - that is all there is to understand.

(Going to her gently)

I am asking you to be my wife. Now will you go with me, Martha?

Martha

(Turns away dazed and choking back her sobs)

No. If I am a maniac, I'm sane enough not to let you ruin yourself for my sake.

Greg

All my life I have been more lonely than I dare confess. If I'm asking you to share that loneliness with me, it can't mean ruin for me, but happiness.

Martha

(Still dazed, but trying to hold onto herself)

Gregory, you don't realize what you're doing -- you don't know what you're saying -- you -- I'm a piece of useless wreckage. Leave me -- this generosity -- this goodness of yours will give me strength -- but you must go -- alone --

Greg

Never!

Martha

Your career -- think -- of what -- and who you are?

Greg

The only career worth having is living hard, helping - fighting battles shoulder to shoulder with one's fellow man. Here's a battle I'm keen for -- your strength and happiness back again -- nothing else matters! You've never had a real chance! But this is no time for argument. You're coming with me.

Martha

(Facing him)

No --

Greg

(Very forcefully)

I'm seldom thwarted. I generally get what I want --

You're coming with me to be my wife.

(He doesn't move.)

Martha

(Standing at the other side)

I haven't the strength -- I haven't the strength to resist so much happiness.

C U R T A I N.